

The Blood of Sprinkling

“When he seeth the blood . . . the LORD will pass over the door, and will not suffer the destroyer . . . to smite you.”

—*Exodus 12:23*

HOW REFRESHING IT IS

for sincere students of the Bible to draw their minds away from the tumultuous, perplexing and often disheartening news emanating from the various political, social, and economic systems of today. At this season of the year, we especially rejoice at the privilege of focusing our mental vision upon the events associated with the Jewish Passover, instituted by God thirty-five centuries ago. Our interest centers especially in the slaying of the lamb, which preceded the week-long Passover Feast. The Passover lamb was slain on the 14th day of the “first month” of the Jews’ religious year. (Exod. 12:2,6) This year that date begins at sundown on Sunday, April 9th.

Many do not see the significance of these events, nor the need to consider them except on a cursory basis. Still others dismiss them entirely as fables and myths. How aptly then, does the Apostle Paul declare that the god of this world has blinded the

minds of many. (II Cor. 4:4) It must be admitted even by critics, however, that an event so prominently marked and so widely observed for this long a time must have foundation in fact. There must have been just such an occurrence in Egypt, else its widespread celebration for more than three millennia would be hard to explain.

THE TENTH PLAGUE

We are reminded that the Israelites were held in bondage by the Egyptians. When the time in God's providence arrived for their deliverance, their masters sought selfishly to maintain their captivity and refused to let them go forth to the land of Canaan. One after another, God sent nine different plagues upon the people of Egypt, relieving them of one after another when their king craved mercy and made promises, which he afterwards broke. The first ten chapters of the Book of Exodus provide a detailed account of these events.

Finally, Moses, the servant of the Lord, announced a tenth plague which would be the gravest of all. The firstborn in every family of Egypt would die in one night. From the home of the humblest servant to the palace of the king there would be great mourning. Even the firstborn of their cattle would die. As a result of this plague, Moses declared, the Egyptians would be glad to yield and let the Israelites go. (Exod. 11:1-8) Indeed, the firstborn in all of Egypt died, and Pharaoh urged the Israelites to leave, and to do so in haste, lest the Lord should ultimately bring death upon the entire people if he continued to harden his heart and resist the divine mandate.—chap. 12:29-33

The tenth plague, it was declared, would be common to the entire land of Egypt, including the part apportioned to the Israelites. They were to show faith and obedience by following God's instructions, so that their firstborn would be spared when the plague came about. In Exodus 12:1-13, it is recorded that in each house of the Israelites, on a certain day, they were to slay a lamb and sprinkle its blood upon the sides and lintels of their doorways. The flesh of the lamb was to be eaten that same night, with bitter herbs and unleavened bread. They were to have their staff in hand, shoes on their feet, ready for a journey, in expectation that the Lord would smite the firstborn of the Egyptians with death and make them willing to let the Israelites go. Paul states the result, that "through faith" Moses and the Israelites "kept the passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest he that destroyed the firstborn should touch them."—Heb. 11:28

GREATER SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PASSOVER

The annual celebration, or memorial, of this Passover was the first feature of the Jewish Law which God instituted. (Exod. 12:14) Even today, the Passover is celebrated by Jews in all parts of the world, with a certain degree of respect, as they remember their deliverance as a nation from Egypt. Most, however, have never thought to inquire further into the true meaning of the celebration. Why was a lamb slain and eaten? Why was its blood sprinkled upon the doorposts and lintels? What reason or object was there behind these specific commands? Could not God have spared the

firstborn, and delivered the Israelites from Egypt, in some simpler fashion?

The harmonious testimony of the Old and New Testament provides the answer to these questions. Yet, even among most professed Christians, the depth of meaning of the types and shadows contained in the Mosaic Law is not understood. Thus, we further ask: Why can it not be discerned by all that the Passover lamb typified the Lamb of God, and that its death represented the death of Jesus, the Messiah? Why do so few understand that the sprinkling of the Passover lamb's blood symbolizes the imputation of the merit, or value, of Jesus' ransom sacrifice to the "firstborn" household of faith, the passed-over class? Why is it that still fewer appreciate the fact that, just as the entire nation of Israel was delivered from bondage as a result of the Passover, all of mankind—not just the firstborn class—will be delivered from their bondage to sin and death.

"Blessed are your eyes," who through faith see that Jesus was indeed "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." (Matt. 13:16; John 1:29) How reassuring it is to know that the cancellation of the world's sin is effected by the payment of Adam's penalty by Jesus, the Lamb of God. How necessary also, is the realization that a satisfaction of God's justice must be made for the removal of this sentence to be effected. Thus, as the Apostles Paul and Peter declare, "Christ died for our sins," "the just for the unjust, that he might bring us back to God."—I Cor. 15:3; I Pet. 3:18

“FIRSTFRUITS” AND “AFTERFRUITS”

The Bible speaks of the consecrated followers of Christ as “the church of the firstborn,” “a kind of firstfruits,” and “firstfruits unto God.” (Heb. 12:23; James 1:18; Rev. 14:4) These references to “firstfruits” imply that others will ultimately be of God’s family—the “afterfruits.” Most professed Christians seem to have overlooked these Scriptures so far as making application of them is concerned. The general belief is that only those who are of the firstfruits will ever be saved, and that there will be no afterfruits. We notice, however, that the Passover was used to fulfill God’s purpose to save all the Israelites. In this picture, as a nation they represented all of mankind, who will be given the opportunity to come into harmony with God and be granted eternal life in the “promised land” of his kingdom.

Thus, we understand that two groups were especially blessed by means of the Passover. There was the blessing upon the entire nation of Israel, when they, by divine power, were miraculously delivered by God and led on a pathway across the channel of the Red Sea, eventually to reach the land of promise. That picture shows the ultimate deliverance from the power of sin and Satan of every creature who will come into accord with the Lord and desire to render him worship. Not an Israelite was left behind in Egypt, and none of mankind will be excluded from the opportunity of deliverance from sin and death.

The other group to be blessed by means of the Passover, and which we, as followers now of the Master, wish to especially focus on, was the firstborn of Israel. Only the firstborn were in immediate

danger of death, and the deliverance of all the nation depended upon the faithfulness and salvation of the firstborn. Applying this in harmony with the Scriptures, we see that only the firstfruits class, the church of the firstborn, are being spared now. They are being passed-over during this nighttime period of man's history by abiding "under the blood" of Jesus' sacrifice as the Lamb of God. Although all righteous and obedient members of mankind will eventually receive deliverance to an earthly land of promise, it is only the firstborn whose names are "written in heaven."—Heb. 12:23

GREAT BLESSINGS—GREAT RESPONSIBILITY

The antitypical firstborn class are those of mankind who, in advance of the remainder, have had the eyes of their understanding opened. They realize their condition of bondage, and the need of deliverance and of God's willingness to fulfill to them his promises. More than this, they are such as have responded to the grace of God, have made a consecration of themselves to him and his service, and in return have been begotten by God's Holy Spirit.

With these firstborn ones, it is a matter of life and death whether they remain in the household of faith under the blood of sprinkling. (I Pet. 1:2) For these to go forth from this condition would imply a disregard of divine favor. It would signify that, having enjoyed their share of the mercy of God as represented in the blood of the Lamb, they were not appreciative of it. Of such the Scriptures declare, "There remaineth no more sacrifice" for their sins. (Heb. 10:26) Their fate is symbolized in the destruction of the firstborn of Egypt.

We do not imply by this that the firstborn of Egypt who died in that night have no further opportunity for life. To the contrary, we understand that all these matters were types and pictures, foreshadowing the realities which pertain to the church of Christ during this Gospel Age. If we have tasted of the “good word of God,” and been made “partakers of the Holy Spirit,” and thus become members of the church of the firstborn, and then willfully fall away, it would be impossible for God to “renew [us] again to repentance.” Such complete and willful disregard of his mercy would result in our eternal death—second death.—Heb. 6:4-6; Rev. 2:11

The church of the firstborn, through the begetting of the Holy Spirit and the greater knowledge and privileges they enjoy, have much more responsibility than the world, and are the only ones during this nighttime period in danger of second death. Thus, this lesson of the Passover type applies to consecrated believers only. By and by, the night will have passed and the glorious morn of deliverance—the Messianic kingdom—will have come. The Christ, the antitypical Moses, Head and body, will deliver all Israel—all the people of God. All mankind will be given knowledge, and a full opportunity, to reverence, honor and obey the will of God.

FEEDING ON THE LAMB

The Apostle Paul positively identifies the Passover lamb with Christ Jesus, saying, “Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: Therefore let us keep the feast.” He further admonishes that we partake of the “unleavened,” or pure, “bread of sincerity and

truth.” (I Cor. 5:7,8) We all need, Paul says, “the blood of sprinkling,” not upon our houses, but upon our hearts. (Heb. 10:22; 12:24) We also must eat the Lamb, that is, appropriate the value of Christ’s sacrifice, his example, and his words and actions, to ourselves. Thus, we not only feed upon Christ by faith, but more and more we put on his character and are transformed day by day into his glorious image in our hearts.—Rom. 8:29; 12:1,2; II Cor. 3:18

As the Jews fed upon the literal lamb, they ate bitter herbs, which aided and whetted their appetite for the lamb. We, too, have bitter experiences and trials, which God permits in our lives. These are to help in weaning our affections from earthly things, and in giving us an increasing appetite to feed upon the Lamb and the unleavened bread of truth. We, too, are to remember that here we are “strangers and pilgrims,” and should have staff in hand, girded for a journey toward the heavenly Canaan promised to the firstborn class.—I Pet. 2:11

Jesus also clearly identified himself with the Passover lamb. On the same night that he was betrayed, he gathered his disciples into the upper room, saying, “With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer.” (Luke 22:15) It was in this setting that our Lord then instituted a new memorial upon the old foundation. His desire was that they no longer annually commemorate the typical Passover, but that they remember him—the true Passover lamb. Paul later reiterated Jesus’ words to this effect, that now they would annually observe a memorial of the antitypical Passover: “This do in remembrance of me.”—I Cor. 11:24,25

Those who recognize the Lamb of God, who in God's purpose had been slain from "the foundation of the world," and who gave his life as man's Redeemer, will see in this Passover season a sacred meaning that others cannot appreciate. (I Pet. 1:18-20; Rev. 13:8) Henceforth they will no longer celebrate the type, but will memorialize the antitype, for Jesus died as the Lamb of God, providing the blood of sprinkling for the church of the firstborn, and spiritual food for the household of faith.

NEW SYMBOLS

Jesus chose new symbols—"bread" and "the fruit of the vine"—to identify himself as the Lamb. (Matt. 26:26-29) By this he showed that his followers should no longer gather as the Jews had done previously to eat the literal Passover supper in commemoration of the deliverance in Egypt. Thenceforth Jesus' followers, in accord with his instruction, celebrated his death as their Passover Lamb every year. After the apostles fell asleep in death, a great falling away from the simple celebration which Jesus had instituted, occurred. During this period, known as the Dark Ages, the teaching that Christ was the Lamb of God continued. However, the celebration of its remembrance became polluted with error. No longer were the bread and fruit of the vine considered symbolic, but were now taught to be the actual body and blood of Jesus. No more was it kept as an annual Memorial, as Jesus instructed, but as a careless ritual, celebrated monthly, weekly, and even daily.

The Apostle Paul wrote, "As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup," do so in remembrance

of Jesus' death. (I Cor. 11:26) Many have misunderstood these words to mean: Do this as often as you please. However, the words really signify: As often as you keep this annual observance, which is Jesus' desire, do it in remembrance of him—the true Passover lamb—rather than in memory of the literal lamb slain in Egypt. Thus, the importance of the celebration is shown to be centered on the one being remembered—Jesus, the Lamb of God. The frequency of its observance, however, need not deviate from the typical arrangement, which was once each year on its anniversary.

Some, who keep this celebration weekly, consider that they have Scriptural precedent for so doing. In the Bible, we read that the Early Church met together on the first day of the week and on such occasions had the “breaking of bread.” (Acts 2:42) It is a mistake, however, to confuse such breaking of bread with the Memorial supper, for the former were merely ordinary meals. There is nothing in the record to indicate otherwise. The “fruit of the vine” is not mentioned in connection with these, and the bread was not said to represent the body of our Lord. It was a cheerful custom in the Early Church to celebrate our Lord's resurrection on the first day of the week, and this practice helped to unite the bonds of brotherhood and fellowship. In many places the Lord's people still follow this custom.

DATE OF THE MEMORIAL SUPPER

In ancient times, the Jews used the moon in the reckoning of their time. Each new moon represented the beginning of a new month. The new moon which

came closest to the spring equinox was reckoned as the beginning of their religious year, the first day of the month Nisan, or Abib, as it is sometimes called. On the fourteenth day of that month, the Passover lamb was slain.

On the fifteenth day, the Feast of the Passover began. (Num. 28:16,17) This feast of seven days was a special time of joy which resulted from the first-born of Israel having been passed over. It well symbolizes the complete joy, peace, and blessing which every true Christian experiences from a realization of the passing over of his sins through the merit of Christ's redemptive sacrifice. All consecrated believers, therefore, have a celebration of this Feast of Passover in their hearts continually—the completeness of the matter being represented in the seven days.

What a great blessing it is to see this subject in its true light, and how important that we lay full weight upon the value of the death of Jesus, "once for all." (Heb. 10:10) Doing so, we can join heartily in remembrance on its anniversary, instead of at various other times and seasons, irregularly and without special significance. Each year, little groups of the Lord's people take heed to this subject, and delight in remembering the Master's death according to his request. As mentioned earlier, the date of this year's Memorial is after sundown on Sunday, April 9th. We anticipate that this celebration will once again bring special blessings to both heart and head, as we are drawn even more closely to our Master and Head, and to each other as members of his body.

SOBERING THOUGHTS

We recall the circumstances of the first Memorial. Jesus “took bread, and blessed it, and brake it.” He gave it to the disciples to eat, saying, “this is my body.” He then took “the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it.” This fruit of the vine, Jesus further explains, represents “my blood, . . . shed for many for the remission of sins.” (Matt. 26:26-29) How precious are these instructions and Jesus’ simple explanation of the meaning of the Memorial emblems to those who are rightly in tune with the Lord.

We have a sobering reminder, however, as we think of the course of Judas. Though highly favored, he loved “filthy lucre” to the extent that he was willing to sell his Master, and was bold enough, even while his treachery toward the Lord was being exposed, to cry, “Is it I?” (Matt. 26:25; Tit. 1:11) The very thought that any who had companied with the Lord could thus lie to him and betray him to his enemies, causes a loathing of such duplicity. It should fill us with great caution, lest in any sense we would, for the sake of honor or wealth or any other earthly advantage, sell the Truth or any of its servants, the members of the body of Christ.

THE FRUIT OF THE VINE

The Master, in his conversation with the apostles, told them, “I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.” (Matt. 26:29) Our Lord was here contrasting two great days—the day of suffering and the day of glory. His First Advent was a day of suffering and

death as the man Jesus. His Second Advent is a day of glory, which will reach its climax in his Father's long-promised kingdom.

The cup, or fruit of the vine, which our Lord gave his disciples represented the work associated with his First Advent—that of providing his blood, the merit of his ransom sacrifice, so that mankind, beginning with his disciples, could be released from Adamic condemnation. Our drinking of that cup signifies two important blessings. First, it reminds us of Jesus' redemptive sacrifice as the only means by which we have a standing before God. Second, it exhilarates us, providing joy, gladness, and spiritual blessings that we could not otherwise enjoy. Prospectively, we also rejoice in the hope of drinking anew the cup of glory in the kingdom. Thus, drinking the cup is not to be thought of as a sorrowful occasion, but a joyous one. "Your sorrow," Jesus told his disciples later that same evening, "shall be turned to joy."—John 16:20

There is no record that Jesus drank of the Memorial cup. Indeed, he was perfect, and had no need to partake of the merits of his own redemptive sacrifice. Jesus did, however, drink symbolically of another cup. It was the cup of experience, suffering and ignominy. He spoke of this cup following his betrayal by Judas, saying, "The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" (John 18:11) Jesus' footstep followers are also invited to drink this cup of experience. "Are ye able," Jesus asks us, "to drink of the cup that I shall drink of?" If our response is, "We are able," he assures us, "Ye shall drink indeed of my cup." (Matt. 20:22,23) The contents of the Memorial cup,

representing the merit of the ransom, we do not share in except to drink it, appropriating its benefits. The cup of experience and suffering, however, represents the sacrificial walk of the entire Christ, Head and body members alike.

THE WAY OF THE CROSS

Jesus said, “If any man will come after me, let him . . . take up his cross daily, and follow me.” (Luke 9:23) We are all passing through the various experiences represented by this statement. We are to submit ourselves to these, crucifying the flesh, and growing as New Creatures. If we “suffer with him,” we will “be also glorified together.” (Rom. 8:17) While our Lord had a great blessing in the obedience which he rendered to the Father, yet it was a trying time for him down to the last moment, when he cried, “It is finished!” (John 19:30) So it will be with us. We must endure faithfully all the experiences, trials and sufferings allowed by God’s providences, even “unto death.”—Rev. 2:10

The sufferings of Christ will be complete when his body members shall have all finished their earthly sojourn. Then they shall share his throne and partake of his glory and the cup of kingdom joys. This is the Lord’s promise to all his faithful saints. For the present, however, let us continue to abide under the “blood of sprinkling,” while feasting on the Lamb of God, the unleavened bread of Truth, and the bitter herbs of experience and trial. By doing so, may we thus be a faithful member of the “church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven,” and “come unto mount Sion, . . . the city of the living God.”—Heb. 12:22-24 ■